

GALATIANS PART 18

GAL. 5:1-13A

Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage. (Gal. 5:1 AV)

For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. (Gal. 5:1 ESV)

I don't know about you, but phrases like this make me stop and think. What did God mean when He had Paul write those words, "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free"?

So often we use terms like "freedom in Christ" without ever fully realizing what they mean.

Let me assure you that there is no direct connection between "freedom in Christ" and the concept of political or social freedom that is promoted by politicians and preachers around the country.

This morning, in a sort of review of what Paul has taught so far in the previous chapters and verses, let's look more closely at what God meant by the phrase "freedom in Christ."

Let's begin by going all the way back to the beginning.

God created man in His own image. God is willful, therefore, man is willful.

God's will is always perfect, yet even God's will is not totally free. God is incapable of making decisions that are contrary to His nature. He cannot choose to lie. He cannot choose to be unjust or unrighteous.

In a similar manner, man's will is not free and was never intended to be.

God placed before Adam two trees – not as choices, but as a way of instructing him in the ways of righteousness. God commanded

Adam, "You must not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil."

Man is willful, but his will is not free. It is bound by the limitations of God's Law. Yet within those limitations, Adam was capable of choosing righteousness and life by continuing to avoid the tree of the knowledge of good and evil while continuing to partake of the tree of life.

One mistake that people make is the belief that God gave Adam a choice in the Garden. While it is true that God gave Adam the ability to choose, He did not give him a choice. God gave Adam a commandment which automatically limited man's will.

Remember that God is discipling and instructing Adam in righteousness. Just as God cannot look on darkness and sin, neither was man to look upon the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He was to remain focused on the tree of life by which he (Adam) would live forever.

Yielding to the deception of Satan, Adam intentionally and with malice aforethought determined to ignore the command of God and to look upon the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

He did not exercise free will by choosing between two trees so much as he made a willful and intentional decision to violate the commandment of God. He allowed his own will to usurp the sovereignty of God.

Why did he do this? Because he preferred the gifts of God over the glory of God.

John Piper says that total depravity of man really is not directly connected to our behavior and our disobedience. But it is directly related to our love of God's gifts more than we love God.

That is why the Holy Spirit had Paul write in Romans 3.23, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

Once Adam looked toward the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he was actually staring into the darkness and away from the light. His vision as well as his will were consequently altered and limited.

There were things that he could no longer see. He could no longer see the righteousness of God and the tree of life.

But there were also things that he began to see that he did not see before. Immediately after his sin, Adam realized that he was naked and needed to cover himself. Why? He had always been naked.

Now, because of his depraved nature, man began to see things as unholy that God had created as pure and holy.

As Adam turned toward the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, not only was there a change in his vision, but there was also a change in his vitality – in his life.

Adam turned his back on the tree of life. As a consequence, he immediately died – not a physical death, which would eventually be his fate as well as all of his descendants – but a spiritual death.

The image of God died within him leaving a void which man would forever after seek to fill with every conceivable device known to man.

Adam no longer had access to the tree of life. He chose unrighteousness and thus lost the ability to see righteousness. He was cut off from the tree of life forever.

Yet Adam realized his loss. Having come to the understanding that disobedience on one point of law had brought him to death, he concluded that obedience would restore him to life. Since the righteousness of God was no longer available to him, he would earn righteousness by being obedient to the law.

So he began to seek righteousness and redemption in the only context available to him: in the realm of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil – in the realm of right and wrong.

This is the context of the Law – the measure of what is good and evil, of what is right and wrong.

Ever since that day, every conflict of man has centered on the question of that which is good and that which is evil – between right and wrong.

- Every playground spat has been about who was right and who was wrong.
- Every church conflict has dealt with who was right and who was wrong.
- Every parent-teen argument has dealt with who was right and who was wrong.
- Every divorce has happened because someone claimed to be right and the other person wrong.
- Every war that has ever been fought has been over the question of which nation was right and which was wrong.

Does man have free will? Certainly he does, but know this – that every free will decision man makes originates in the context of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil – in the realm of unrighteousness and death.

Even should a man choose to do only that which is good, he would still be making that decision in the realm of darkness.

That is why man can never be good enough to merit God's grace. That is why all of our righteousness is as filthy rags. It is why all have sinned and fallen short of the level of glory which would be required to be welcomed into God's presence.

There is no measure of good that would good enough because even decisions for good are made in the context of unrighteousness.

Following Adam's sin, men may have maintained their free will, but they were no longer able to choose righteousness because they could no longer see righteousness.

God cast men out of the Garden of Eden so that man no longer had access to the tree of life and to its fruit of righteousness.

In fact, man lost, not only the ability to see righteousness, but he also lost both the desire and the will to seek after righteousness.

Men were condemned by the disobedience of Adam to live forever under the misconception that they could find redemption, and righteousness, and life in the law – in being a good person.

Condemned forever except for one thing – God’s plan of redemption created before the foundation of the world.

I believe that Paul is given to us in the NT for more than just a contributor to the canon of Scripture. He is more than just a great Christian, a great teacher, an apostle and disciple maker.

I believe he is a living example of how the grace of God works in the lives of lost men.

Go back if you will to chapter 1 and listen again to Paul’s testimony concerning his own salvation.

Gal 1:15 But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, 16 was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone;

God set Paul apart – meaning that God chose Paul – as He does all the redeemed – while Paul was still in the womb – before he was born.

God...

- Chose me before I was born
- Called me by His grace
- Revealed His son to me when it pleased Him
- So that I would proclaim the gospel message to the nations

Jeremiah records almost this exact testimony in...

Jer. 1:5 Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.

Someone might make the argument that this is the way God worked only with men who had a special calling on their lives. It is not the way that He brings all men to salvation.

Yet look at the last part of Paul’s testimony. Why did God save him? To proclaim or to preach the gospel message of the gospel of grace in Jesus Christ to all the nations.

Eph. 2:10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Amplified: For we are God’s <own> handiwork (His workmanship), recreated in Christ Jesus, <born anew> that we may do those good works which God predestined (planned beforehand) for us <taking paths which He prepared ahead of time>, that we should walk in them <living the good life which He prearranged and made ready for us to live>.

This is not just the testimony of Jeremiah and of Paul; it is the testimony – or at least should be the testimony – of anyone who claims to know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Anyone who claims to be saved but is not involved in the proclamation of the gospel of Christ is only fooling themselves. That is what saved people do.

Now here is what I want you to see in Paul’s testimony...

Paul said that when it pleased God, He revealed Christ to him.

John 6:44 No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.

Once again, Paul is an example of the plan of redemption.

All of us may not be struck down blind on the road to Damascus, but everyone who comes to know Christ as Savior will have a light

that reveals to him that which he could not see before it pleased God to reveal it.

Here is a man who may be living a good life or maybe living the most despicable and vile life that is possible. Just look at the life of Paul. Before God finally saved him, he was, in essence a murderer, taking the lives of those who proclaimed Christ as Savior.

And one day, when it pleased God – when Paul least expected anything like this to happen to him – God revealed something to him that he could not see before.

When Adam sinned, he lost sight of righteousness and the tree of life. Afterwards, all of man's choices were in the realm of unrighteousness. Now God reveals something to man that he has never before seen – the light and the righteousness of Christ.

The contrast is startling and so remarkable that he stops in his tracks, changes directions, and begins to move toward the light. Now he is enabled to do what he could not have done before, even if he had had the desire to do so – he can now express his free will in the direction of Christ and His righteousness.

And one he comes to the awareness of the grace and the mercy of God in the person of Jesus Christ, he will not be able to resist the call of the Holy Spirit.

John Piper illustrates this point as well as anyone I have ever heard in his sermon series entitled “Don’t Waste Your Life.”

I live in this bubble of depraved indifference and darkness.

Around my neck is this broach. It feels kinda hard and smooth and, in the dark, I call it may ebony broach.

I feel it and I fondle it every day. I fondle and caress it year after year. It is such a smooth, satisfying, ebony broach.

Then grace happens and by the power of the Holy Spirit, my eyes begin to open to the reality around me.

Then the bubble bursts and the light shines upon me.

I look down and my ebony broach is really a roach on a string around my neck.

God rips it off and throws it away and there is no sense of sacrifice on my part.

But it would have felt that way in the darkness.